

The Church, Christ's Kingdom

Some religious folk make a distinction between the church and the kingdom. A popular theological system maintains that the church is an interim institution that will continue until Christ returns to reign on earth for a thousand years. According to this system, when Christ returns to earth, he will establish his kingdom. Does the Bible teach that the church and the kingdom are separate institutions?

First, Daniel predicted that God would one day establish a kingdom that would never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44; 7:14). He also specified the period of history when this would take place (Dan. 2:31-46). The kingdom was to come in the time of the Roman Empire.

Second, Zachariah predicted that the promised Branch, who was the Messiah. Zachariah said that this Branch, the seed of David, would "sit and rule upon his throne (Zach. 6:13)." Christ served as priest during the first century; therefore, he occupied the throne of David and began to rule over his kingdom in the first century.

Third, Jesus used the words *church* and *kingdom* interchangeably (Matt. 16:16-18). He identified his church and the kingdom and showed that the words *church* and *kingdom* refer to the same group of people and to the same institution.

Fourth, the language of the Hebrew writer proves that the church and kingdom are the same (Heb. 12:22-28). He says that we have come to the church of the firstborn (Christ) and that we have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:23, 28).

Fifth, when we are born of the water and the spirit, we enter the Lord's kingdom established on the Day of Pentecost after Christ's resurrection (John 3:1-5; Acts 2). At the same time and by the same process, the Lord adds us to his church (Acts 2:37-47).

Finally, prior to this Pentecost, the Bible speaks of the church and the kingdom in future terms. Christ taught, "There are some here . . . who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power (Mark 9:1)." He also said, "Upon this rock I will build my church (Matt 16:18)." Following this Pentecost, the Bible speaks of the kingdom and the church as being in existence. The Bible says that he "translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love (Col 1:13);" we receive "a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28);" and he "made us *to be* a kingdom (Rev 1:6)." Of the church Paul wrote, "He . . . gave him to be head over all things to the church which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all (Eph 1:22-23)."